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ABSTRACT

The program of the Fairview German Bilingual School, the elementary (K-5) segment of the Cincinnati public school system's German bilingual alternative program, is described. The school provides intensive second-language instruction in German for monolingual English-speaking children with bilingualism as the objective. In 1984-85 the student body numbered 510, from 50 Cincinnati neighborhoods. An active parents' group is a major program element. The teaching staff includes basic classroom teachers for the standard grade-level curriculum and German-language teachers with near-native fluency and extensive exposure to the people, cultures, and institutions of a German-speaking country. The kindergarten German instruction consists of three 20-minute sessions a week. From first grade on, a sequenced and highly structured oral language curriculum is used. German and English-language curricula are integrated to the extent possible. Student academic achievement has been average or above average in reading and mathematics, and German achievement, while difficult to assess comparatively, has been high. The elementary program is followed by a middle school offering bilingual instruction in German, French, and Spanish, an exchange program option, and a choice of international or college preparatory high school programs. The Fairview program has attracted strong community interest and parental commitment. (MSE)

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Fairview German Bilingual School: A Successful Model for Elementary-School, Second-Language Learning

by Frederick P. Veidt

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Fairview German Bilingual School:

A Successful Model for Elementary-School, Foreign-Lanugage Instruction

In 1974, prompted by concern over an increasing degree and number of racially isolated schools and by a lack of curricular options, the Board of Education of the Cincinnati Public Schools established the first of a series of alternative or magnet schools with the intention of promoting voluntary integration. Among these early options in education was the first of the district's now highly successful foreign language programs for elementary school pupils--the German-English Bilingual Alternative School. Given the ethnic heritage of the city of Cincinnati, the historical affinity of its public schools for the teaching of German,[1] and the existence of a German FLES program, then in its eighth year of operation, as a source of experience and a base for expansion, the choice of German as the target language for an initial, intensive, elementary-school, second-language program is not surprising. Unlike conventional bilingual programs, the teaching focus of this alternative school is on the monolingual English-speaking child with bilingualism in German being the aim of the overall sequence of instruction. In keeping with the theme of this conference, the presentation will concentrate on Fairview German Bilingual School, which represents the elementary-school (K-5) segment of the total German Bilingual Alternative Program, with only peripheral mention given to the later stages of the instructional sequence.

Goals

Although a significant amount of curricular time is devoted to second language instruction, academic achievement in the basic-skills is also of primary importance. This dual emphasis is expressed in a set of program goals for each element. The German-language component endeavors to provide pupils with:

1) an opportunity to learn to understand, to speak, to read, and to write German;
2) an understanding of and appreciation for the German speaking peoples and their way of life;
3) an awareness of the contributions of the German language, German customs, and the German-speaking peoples to American life and society;
4) a command of a second language as a tool leading toward more options in career decisions, both in professional and vocational fields;
5) positive multi-ethnic and multi-cultural attitudes.

In the standard English portion of the curriculum the pupil will:

1) gain knowledge of phonics-based English language reading, pronunciation, and spelling;
2) demonstrate improved learning habits and study skills as manifested by a lengthening attention span and an increasing ability to work independently;
3) behave in a manner reflecting increasing self-discipline and respect for others;

4) attain mean grade level proficiencies in reading and mathematics that are at least equal to the current national average as measured by selected standardized achievement tests.

Enrollment and Student-Body Characteristics

During the 1984-85 school year a total of 510 pupils were enrolled in grades K-5 at Fairview German Bilingual School. Approximately fifty-four percent of these youngsters were White, forty-four percent were Black and two percent were of Oriental or Spanish descent. More than eighty-five percent of the pupils live in excess of one mile from the school and are eligible for district and state subsidized transportation service. The school draws its student body from fifty different neighborhoods and, thus, reflects the racial, social, and economic composition of the total Cincinnati school population.

Matriculation is generally at the kindergarten or first grade level. Occasionally, children with no prior German-language experience are accepted directly into the second grade on a space-available basis if such youngsters are deemed able to deal with the entire standard curriculum at or above grade level and to catch up on one year of second-language instruction. Children with previous background in German may be admitted to grades beyond the second. Kindergarten and first grade admittance are on a first-come, first-served basis. Achieving and maintaining racial balance is also of prime consideration in the acceptance procedures.

Parents who desire a bilingual program for their children are interviewed and are advised that a major strength of the German Bilingual

Program is the existence of an active, concerned, and involved parents' group.[2] Parents of potential applicants and their children are encouraged to visit the school, to observe classes in session, to inspect the facilities, and to discuss the German Bilingual Alternative with program administrators, teachers, and other staff members.

Staffing

Instructional personnel fall into two categories, i.e., basic classroom teachers and German-language instructors. Basic classroom teachers, of which there were eighteen on full-time contract during the 1984-85 school year, are responsible for the standard grade level curriculum. At the primary level a self-contained classroom procedure is utilized. The basic classroom teachers operate in a semi departmentalized structure at the intermediate level. With a few exceptions, basic classroom teachers have only minimal competency in German. Beyond the kindergarten level, German instruction is given by itinerant language specialists, each of whom is responsible for three or four classes usually at a specific grade level. The German instructors work with small (twelve to fifteen pupils), homogeneous, ability-level groups, as well as with entire classes, in specially-designated German classrooms. Approximately one hour of the daily schedule is devoted to second language instruction. Four full-time staff members were serving in this category during 1984-85.

Basic classroom teachers are selected on the basis of their certification, ability, background, experience, interest, and commitment to the alternative-school concept, in general, and to Fairview German

Bilingual School, in particular. German language instructors must possess near-native fluency in German, must have had extensive and intensive exposure to the people, culture, and institutions of a German-speaking country, and must hold the appropriate teaching certificate. Furthermore, they must exhibit the willingness, enthusiasm, and ability necessary to instruct elementary-aged children.

The rationale for the two-pronged approach to staffing is based on several factors. It is extremely difficult to find teachers who meet the German-language portions of the above requirements and who also have certification as elementary teachers, especially in the numbers that would be needed to staff the entire school. Therefore, the German-language instructors have been selected from the ranks of those who hold certification as secondary German teachers. In Ohio a teacher holding secondary foreign-language certification is eligible for special K-12 certification in the same language. Furthermore, the utilization of itinerant second-language teachers who visit each of several classrooms on an established schedule helps ensure that second-language instruction will occur routinely on a daily basis and that such instruction will not be skipped, slighted or relegated to a position of lesser importance due to the curricular or time demands besetting one teacher who has dual responsibility for both curricula. Finally, the use of two types of teaching personnel aids in fulfilling a school-district policy that ca. thirty percent of the instructional staff of each school be Black. Given the dearth of Black German teachers, it would be next to impossible to meet this requirment without the dual approach to staffing.

Philosophically, Fairview German Bilingual School seeks to staff its program with teachers who believe that children in the early grades perform at their best academically in an orderly environment where basic skills and self-discipline are taught as a foundation for the development of creative self-directed enterprise. In an atmosphere of this nature, the children learn that teachers and peers expect maximum effort scholastically and behaviorally. Thus, the pupils are imbued with a sense of security and continuity in the realization that, from teacher to teacher and from year to year, the same standards and expectations apply. And indication of staff agreement with this philosophy and of staff satisfaction with an assignment to Fairview German Bilingual School can be seen in the school's low teacher-turnover rate[3] and in the positive replies to school-assignment commitment on district-wide teacher surveys.[4]

Curriculum and Instruction

German instruction at the kindergarten level is given for 20 minutes three times a week and focuses on greetings, common expressions and basic vocabulary building. The children learn songs, dances and rhymes, play games and listen to stories. Beginning in the first grade and thereafter, the pupils learn German within the framework of a sequenced and highly structured oral language curriculum. Close cooperation and planning between the classroom and German teachers ensure that instruction in English and German are complementary and that the two curricula are integrated to the extent possible.

The instructional focus in the first grade is on the development

of aural/oral proficiencies. During German class, English is not used by either the pupils or by the teacher. In this regard the aim is to take advantage of young children's proclivity to talk, their relative lack of inhibition, their view of a second language as a secret means of communication, the absence of strong peer-group pressures and of related adolescent and pubescent interferences.

Action verbs, such as come, go, show, draw, fetch, take, give, sit down, stand up, run, ride, drive, throw, eat, laugh and cry, are stressed. Realia, especially those from the children's home and school environment, are seen, felt, and manipulated by the children. Handpuppets put in constant classroom appearances and a seemingly endless variety of games are played. The effective domain is included by teaching the children the vocabulary and gestures associated with sharing, taking turns, and other basic courtesies. To aid in the development of the pupils' listening and speaking skills, Hermann Schuh's Komm bitte![5] materials, which were designed for use with Gastarbeiter children, have proven to be an invaluable source of suggestions and practical ideas. Indeed, this series represents the core of our instructional activities at the primary level.

To supplement the core materials, concepts of the first grade social studies curriculum are coordinated with the culture of the German-speaking peoples. Mathematics' operations are drilled and practiced and grade-level appropriate art, music, and physical education activities also occur during German time. No formal reading or writing activities in German take place during the first grade. The rationale

for this is based on the intent to establish a solid aural/oral foundation and on the desire to avoid possible interference with the developmental stages of the youngsters' reading and writing skills in English.

In second grade the major emphasis is still on the development of aural/oral skills. In addition, the pupils are introduced to German reading-readiness skills using the same phonics-based approach[6] employed in the English curriculum. In an effort to keep the pupils from developing the perception that Germans are just like Americans except that the former talk funny, basic cultural awareness begins to receive increased instructional attention through the use of a variety of devices including slides, filmstrips, and the first few films of the Guten Tag[7] series. Included is the concept of country and the comparative sizes and locations of the United States and Germany.

In grade three pupils continue to build their aural/oral proficiencies, to expand their reading skills through the use of German-language readers,[8] and to acquire a core of geography and social studies concepts and terms. At this level work is begun with a supplemental German workbook.[9] Designed as a remedial instrument for use in the Federal Republic of German with Legasteniker, i.e., children who experience difficulty in learning to read, the workbook provides a variety of German language-arts activities in a colorful, interest-holding, culturally-true, and difficulty-level appropriate format.

The fourth and fifth grade German curricula include reading and language arts and a reinforcement of content-area instruction. Mathematics' word problems are introduced. Units of the English social

studies and science/health curricula are also taught in German, increasing the students' familiarity with terminology and related concepts in the target language. Typical instructional units include map skills, graphs, the city and suburbs, Ohio and Cincinnati history and animal classifications. Units devoted to the study of mammals and of birds and their habitats culminate in bilingual field trips held in cooperation with the Cincinnati Zoo which provides facilities, materials, and supplemental instructional personnel. With growing second-language competency, the amount of content-area teaching in German is gradually increased from grade to grade. Some content-area material is taught only in German while other units are treated in both languages with varying degrees of overlap and reinforcement.

To supplement normal classroom pursuits, pupils participate in several traditional American and German holiday festivities. Plays, performances, and spelling bees are presented in both languages. Numerous excursions of a cultural and/or educational nature are scheduled throughout the year as an integral part of the curriculum. The school offers a math/science enrichment program to qualified pupils as well as a number of after-school activities which currently include a computer club, a German chorus, extended-day physical education, a German folk-dance group, and Scouting troops.

Academic Achievement

The goals of the German Bilingual Program can be summarized as the acquisition of German language skills in a framework of basic academic

achievement. In a situation where approximately twenty-five percent of the available instructional time is devoted to an alternative subject, it is essential that basic skills be learned and maintained.

Each spring the Cincinnati Public Schools administers a series of standardized achievement tests[10] to its pupils. Results on these tests are summarized in three stanine groupings, i.e., below average (1-3), average (4-6) and above average (7-9). Annually since 1976 a total of ninety percent to ninety-eight percent of the German Bilingual pupils have scored in the average or above-average categories in both reading and mathematics. This rate is substantially higher than the expected nationwide result of seventy-seven percent in the same categories and supports the contention that German Bilingual pupils are being given the opportunity to learn a second language beginning in elementary school without sacrificing vital, fundamental, basic-skills' proficiencies.

Assessing the pupils' German-language achievement is much more difficult. Applicable standardized test instruments that adequately measure the abilities of the target population are simply nonexistent. Those standardized German-language tests currently available are designed for secondary-school and university-level students and measure second-language skills in a manner and degree which do not coincide with the instructional philosophy, goals, and emphases of the Cincinnati Public Schools' curriculum. However, in an effort to provide some basic comparative data, pupils completing the eighth grade are administered Form LA of the Modern Language Association-Cooperative

Foreign Language Tests for German.[11] An arbitrary application of the Second Year High School Audio-Lingual German Norms reveals average mid-percentile ranks of ninety-five for speaking, eighty for listening, seventy-two for reading, and sixty-three for writing. Since test content validity is low, few interpretations can be made from these data other than to say that the pupils are learning German in accordance with program goals and that the rate of that learning is superior to that of the average American second-language learner.

Articulation

Upon completion of Fairview German Bilingual School, pupils in grades six through eight attend Cincinnati Bilingual Academy, the district's bilingual middle school which serves those who have completed a five-year sequence in German, French or Spanish. The curriculum at the middle school is intended to bridge the gap between the conversational focus of the elementary grades and the expectations of the more traditional secondary and university language programs. Eventually students will attend universities which will expect them to have mastered certain skills and concepts. The curriculum at the middle school begins to prepare pupils for those expectations.

Between the seventh and eighth grades German Bilingual pupils are given the opportunity to apply for participation in an exchange program which has been established with the Donaueschingen (Germany) Middle School. Begun in 1980 through the auspices of the American Association of Teachers of German and the Pädagogischer Austauschdienst as a one-way

experience for Cincinnati German Bilingual youngsters, the endeavor has expanded to a full exchange which is now associated with the Goethe Haus connected German-American Partnership Program (GAPP). By the end of the current (1984-85) school year a total of 147 Donaueschingen and Cincinnati pupils will have spent a month in each other's country, lived with each other's family, studied at each other's school, and been exposed to each other's way of life.

In grades nine through twelve bilingual pupils have three options for continuing their second-language studies. The Cincinnati Public Schools' International Studies Academy offers both a globally-oriented curriculum as well as the academically-rigorous International Baccalaureate Degree program. By attaining a qualifying entrance-examination score, pupils can also attend the district's college preparatory secondary school. Lastly, pupils may attend their neighborhood or a private or parochial high school. Approximately forty-five percent of the German Bilingual pupils choose the first option, forty-five percent the second and ten percent the third.

In summary, what began as an alternative-school experiment to reduce racial isolation has developed into a unique German language learning opportunity of proven academic success. The student body represents a social, racial, and economic cross section of the district's population. Despite the lack of selection criteria, achievement test results have substantially exceeded the performance of both nationally and locally normed groups on measures of reading and mathematics. Competition for available

openings is indicative of strong community interest. An active and committed group of parents, eighty-five percent of whom have chosen to bus their children to an alternative school for, in some cases, as long as an hour one way rather than take a short walk to a neighborhood facility, recognizes and supports the value of learning a second language. For their children who are learning to communicate with our neighbors abroad, positive human relationships and attitudes are being facilitated and a valuable tool leading toward increased career options is being developed.

Notes

[1]Cincinnati has been credited by Theodore Andersson, Foreign Languages in the Elementary School (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 59-60, as the first city in the United States to introduce optional German-language instruction into the curriculum of its public schools. In the late 1880's more than fifty percent of all Cincinnati Public Schools' pupils were receiving German instruction and by 1900 the system employed almost 180 German teachers to instruct 18,000 pupils. For further details see Edwin H. Zeydel, "The Teaching of German in Cincinnati," Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin, 20, 1962. pp. 29-37.

[2]The parents' organization has formed a non-profit, tax exempt foundation to provide support for the school. In addition to furnishing financial and fund-raising expertise to supplement public school revenues and to help carry out special activities such as the exchange program, members of the parents' organization and its advisory board also act as school and classroom volunteers, provide needed improvements to the physical facilities, sponsor and assist at extra curricular events, disseminate public-relations information, and serve as liaison between the school and the Board of Education.

[3]Since its inception in 1974, approximately one teacher has left the program every two years.

[4]On a scale of 1.00 to 7.00, Fairview German Bilingual teachers recently accorded their commitment to remain at their present assignment if offered another teaching location a rating of 6.12. Cincinnati Public School System, Evaluation Branch, Teacher Survey, December, 1984.

[5]Munich: Hueber, 1974.

[6]Charles C. Walcutt and Glen McCracken, Lippincott Basic Reading (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

[7]This set of 26 black and white, 16mm sound films was written by Rudolf Schneider and produced by the Studienprogramm des Bayerischen Rundfunks and the Goethe Institute in Munich in 1968. Distribution rights in the United States are held by International Film Bureau, Inc., Chicago. The entire series has been integrated into the German Bilingual Program curriculum of the Cincinnati Public Schools.

[8]We are currently using Ellen Blance and Ann Cook, Monster-Hefte, trans. by Christian Hünerhoff (Stuttgart: Klett, 1980 and 1981); Elizabeth Guilfoile, Niemand hört auf Andreas, trans. by Annette Haase (Chicago: Follett, 1961); and Esther K. Meeks, Die Neugierige Kuh, trans. by Annette Haase (Chicago: Follett, 1961).

[9]Ilse Herrndobler and Horst Scholz, Lachen und Lernen mit Uli (Munich: List, n.d.).

[10]California Achievement Tests (Monterey, California: CTB/McGraw Hill, 1977).

[11]Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1965. Although dated, this test instrument was chosen over other more current materials due to the fact that all four second-language skills are tested.